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 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

## *Well-traveled lawyer joins team in Iraq*

By John Connor  
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**TALLIL**, Iraq – Iraq is country number 96 for Mike Rea, a lawyer with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

In his 66 years, Rea has been all over the globe, on his own as well as with the Air Force and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. He just arrived in Tallil, a former Iraqi air base near Nasiriyah in Southern Iraq, for a four-month tour with the Corps' Gulf Region South district. Last year, he served a six-month tour in Kabul, Afghanistan with the Corps.

He received his law degree from the University of Texas in Austin and a Master's degree in law from George Washington University in Washington, D.C. He is awaiting specific marching orders in Tallil from the GRS commander, Col. Steve Hill, but stands ready to handle a mixed bag of legal issues, from contract to personnel to fiscal law issues.

Rea gave expression to his adventurous spirit by visiting Central and South America as a young man. He then served five years in the Air Force, including a tour in Taiwan. This allowed him to travel in Asia and visit such countries as Vietnam. He later broadened his Asia travel while serving two tours in Japan with the Corps of Engineers. And he also had a five-year stint in Europe with the Corps, which enabled him to travel all over that continent.



Mike Rea recently arrived in Tallil, Iraq for duty with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Gulf Region South district there. (USACE photo by John Connor)

His favorite spot? "Bali," Rea replied without a moment's hesitation. Why, the Indonesian island's renowned beaches? "The beaches, sure, but a lot more," he said, citing the arts and culture in general as well as the friendliness of its people.

Another of Rea's favorite spots on the globe is Uruguay. He said he likes to visit there because the atmosphere is "really laid back," or as they say in Uruguay, "esta muy tranquilo."

The globe-trotting Rea hails from Kansas and now calls Winchester, Va. home. One of his two children, his daughter, also has the travel bug. She is married to a

French diplomat and has lived abroad for years, currently in the Ukraine, which, of course, Rea visited.

What has he learned from his travels? "The easy answer is that I have certainly gained an appreciation of other cultures and mores," Rea said. "I grew up in a small town in Kansas and lived there until I was an adult.

Consequently, I had a rather insular view of the world.

"I was fortunate in that I grew up in a somewhat liberal household, but nonetheless I had little exposure to cultures other than my own," he continued. "Not that I ever believed my little world was the best of all possible worlds, but I certainly had little understanding or appreciation of others' cultures, religions and customs."

Have his travels helped him in his in his dealings with others on the job and elsewhere? "My exposure to the cultures of Europe, Asia, South America and the Middle East and Africa has clearly taught me to be tolerant of others and this attitude has transferred to my professional life as well," Rae said.

He provides truth in packaging when discussing his 96 countries visited. For instance, the total includes East Germany, which was a country when he visited but no longer exists.

Rea said he takes "lots of pictures" on his travels but is "strictly an amateur."

Notable junkets included a trip that went from Beijing to Moscow, the largest chunk coming on the Trans-Siberian Railroad, as well as a trek from Katmandu in Nepal to Lhasa in Tibet and back again. Complications on the return leg included thread-bare tires (only one of which was replaced before launch) and permit issues. "It was hairy," he said.

Another issue on that trip was altitude, Rea said, relating some of his traveling companions were hurting at altitudes as high 17,000 feet. Nor was he immune. "I woke up gasping for breath," he recalled, calling the whole trip "an adventure."

Rea, who retired in 2001 only to return to work, said coming to Iraq was a last minute thing. He said he had been prepared to go back to Afghanistan, which he characterized as "pretty primitive" and "in pretty sad shape" after all its troubles. But he said the people there are "very open" and "proud of their country."

Before he leaves this part of the world, Rea would like to add to the number of countries where he has spent time. Other Middle Eastern nations he'd like to visit include Syria, Jordan and Yemen.

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